

Resource Advisory Committee Meeting March 24, 2011 – Walden, CO

ATTENDEES:

RAC Members

Duane Short (Albany County)
Jack Berger (Caron County)
Linda Fleming (Carbon County)
Ron Iversen (Carbon County)
Barbara Vasquez (Jackson County)
Jeff Fry (Jackson County)
John Rich (Jackson County)
Ty Wattenberg (Jackson County)
Win Dermody (Routt County)

Forest Service Employees

Rick Cooksey
Phil Cruz
Paula Guenther
Diann Ritschard
Becky Romios
Aaron Voos

Due to absent RAC members, the following proxies were established:

Albany County: Jerry Schmidt proxy to Duane Short

Carbon County: Jerry Paxton proxy to Linda Fleming and Arla Strasser proxy to Jack Berger

Routt County: Doug Monger proxy to Jeff Fry and Sonja Macys proxy to Win Dermody

TITLE II PROJECT STATUS :

(Title II Project Status handout)

Win Dermody: In 2010, the Routt County representatives voted to spend the entire allotment on the Buffalo Pass Road project. Liz Shnackenberg, Hydrologist on the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District, assisted them and ensured that all processes were followed. Hopefully, gravel will be placed on the road this field season, but due to timing and heavy use the project may extend into 2012. Legacy funds served as a partner and gave additional money, enabling the lower portion of the road to be completed.

Jack Berger: Both of the 2010 Carbon County funded projects (East Fork Encampment Weir Removal and Cook Spring Development Reconstruction) should be completed this field season.

Duane Short and Phil Cruz: Albany County has three projects underway, the Lake Creek Culvert Replacement project, the Albany County Road Decommissioning project, and the Albany County Ditch Clearing project. Pending completion of agreements and specifics, the Albany County Road Decommissioning and Ditch Clearing projects should be completed this summer and into 2012. The culvert replacement project was only partially funded last year.

John Rich: Jackson County funded the Ninegar Creek Realignment project, the Grizzly-Helena Trail Hazard Tree Removal project, the Jackson County Outdoor Education Network project, and the Grizzly-Helena Trail Crossing project. Progress on all projects should be starting this spring, summer, and into the fall.

Barabara Vasquez: The native seed collection will take place this summer and fall.

FUNDING:

(County Title II Funds 2008-2011 handout)

Diann Ritschard: The 2008-2009 columns show the amount of money awarded each year. The 2010 column represents the new monies, which will be awarded at this meeting. The second displays what each county has done so far.

Question from Barbara Vasquez: Can counties spend any additional money that comes back after completion of projects?

Diann Ritschard: Yes, but any returns will be very minimal.

DISCUSSION OF NEW PROJECTS:

John Rich: Each county will make their own priorities but it is recommended to also use the expertise of other counties.

Albany County: Duane Short reported he and Jerry Schmidt basically agreed they would rather see funds go to completing the Lake Creek Culvert Replacement project.

Carbon County: Jack Berger gave an overview of the three county projects. The Encampment River Fish Passage project had no committed partners and everything seemed to be pending. The Conservation District may want to improve irrigation structures and go hand in hand on the project. The Boykin Encampment River Restoration project near Riverside had multiple partners. However, Linda Fleming expressed the weakest aspect of the project is that the majority of work would be on private land. It still meets the requirements, but it makes the process more difficult.

Diann Ritschard: Reminded Carbon County that even though the Boykin Encampment River Restoration project would be on private land, they would still need to follow the NEPA process because Federal money would be used.

Jack Berger continued that the Carbon County Road Decommissioning project came back up to the front. Linda Fleming addressed that the project would need some clarification to ensure that it would be helping the public as well as the Forest.

Routt County: Win Dermody explained that last year's first priority was the Buffalo Pass Road project. Routt County had decided not to do any road decommissioning, but the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears district liked the handicap accessible fishing pier and the group received a large legacy grant to assist with protecting the wetlands.

Jackson County: Barbara Vasquez reported that the Grizzly Winter Parking project would go well beyond the budget even though it would be well used. The Sawmill Gravel Pit Improvement project had been discussed with Mike Wright, Parks District Ranger, as well as Liz Schnakenberg, Hydrologist. The pit hasn't been used since the 90s and the Forest Service engineer mentioned that the small amount of gravel left in the original site may be difficult to access without interrupting wetland fens. However, a second site was available. Of the two native seed collection projects, the Forest Service was

instrumental in getting the greenhouse up in the North Park High School. The local science teacher and Forest Service personnel are enthusiastic about establishing native grasses after the beetle epidemic.

Phil Cruz reminded each county that if a more expensive project is chosen, implementation can be deferred until next year's money becomes available.

Question from Barbara Vasquez: If we select a project to fund for this year, can it be implemented this calendar year?

Phil Cruz: Yes, but District Rangers would need to be contacted regarding priorities. The Forest Service has to go through the Grants & Agreements process.

Diann Ritschard added that travel money comes out of county budgets.

Each County caucused to discuss new project funding priorities.

SELECTION OF NEW PROJECTS:

Albany County: Duane Short reported that their priority would stay with the Lake Creek Fish Passage Restoration project. Albany County's entire budget (\$28,341) would be granted to the Lake Creek Fish Passage Restoration project. The County wanted to ensure that the project, which had already been started, received enough funding to complete it. The North Laramie Range Aspen Restoration project was not chosen because it needed more money than the county had to offer. They also felt that the effectiveness was questionable.

Carbon County: Linda Fleming reported that the Boykin Encampment River Restoration project was the number one priority. They would contribute the allotted amount plus \$10,000 extra for the NEPA process. The second priority would go to the Carbon County Road Decommissioning project, contributing \$35,000. The county decided not to fund the Encampment River Fish Passage project this year because they felt it would be best to tie in increased recreation opportunities, irrigation, and fish passage into one project. Any additional money will be carried over to the next budget year.

Diann Ritschard added that the county had decided to fund the projects without site visits. The high country is not accessible until July, so the final decision was made in an effort not to hold up progress.

Routt County: Win Dermody stated their first priority will be allotting the \$19,000 for the NFSR 225 Travel Management project. This project will close and relocate a road outside of a wetland area. The second project which receives priority will be the Hahns Peak Lake Accessible Trail/Fishing Piers. They will allot the \$22,000 to build three handicap fishing piers near the campground along with ¼ mile of handicap accessible trail. The county decided not to fund the seed collection and to leave \$683 for their travel budget as well as help other counties finish up projects with any leftover money.

Jackson County: Barbara Vasquez said that after positive discussion, funding the native seeding project at \$9,000 was their first priority. The three steps in the native seed process include collecting the ripe seed, cleaning and propagating them, and developing germination protocols for each seed. This project

was chosen because it allows for great collaboration between the Forest Service and the school district.

Caveat: They will need assurance through a finalized agreement between the Forest Service and the North Park High School before money is granted.

Jackson County will allot the rest of their money (\$9,875) to the Sawmill Gravel Pit Improvement project as their second priority.

DECISIONS:

-Duane Short moved to solely fund the Lake Creek Fish Passage Restoration project in Albany County. Barbara Vasquez seconded the motion. Motion passed.

-Jack Berger moved to fund the Boykin Encampment River Restoration project as well as \$35,000 to the Carbon County Road Decommissioning project. Linda Fleming seconded the motion. Motion passed.

-Win Dermody moved to fund the NFSR 225 Travel Management project (\$19,000) and the Hahns Peak Lake Accessible Trail/Fishing Piers project (\$22,000). Jeff Fry seconded the motion. Motion passed.

-Barbara Vasquez moved to approve the Native Seed Collection project with the caveat of assuring an agreement is in place between the Forest Service and the North Park High School. The remaining funds would be applied to the Sawmill Gravel Pit Improvement project. Ty Wattenberg seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Diann Ritschard added that Phil Cruz and John Rich must sign each funded proposal to get them started in the process.

John Rich announced that the Resource Advisory Committee wanted to congratulate Phil Cruz on his acceptance to the Forest Supervisor position.

TRAVEL UPDATES:

Despite the lengthy process, each member who turned in mileage was reimbursed. Reimbursement forms were available for members who had already been through the GovTrip processes as well as forms for members who would like to start the reimbursement process.

NEXT STEPS:

John Rich proposed that the group meet in the fall to provide updates on all funded projects. Each county will be responsible to coordinate with District Rangers, monitor the county projects, and report their status to the group at the next meeting tentatively scheduled for **October 19, 2011 in Laramie, WY at 10:30am.**

Jack Berger proposed that public attendance time be moved to the beginning of the meetings in an effort to allow for public attendance despite meetings adjourning early.

Diann Ritschard announced that she will be retiring in June and Aaron Voos will be taking over as coordinator of the RAC.

THE PLANNING RULE:

Planning Rule Information Websites:

www.fs.fed.us

www.govcomments.com

www.fs.usda.gov/goto/planningrule

Phil Cruz explained that nothing is definitive with the new Planning Rule. He said he has learned to start getting excited when it looks like things are getting close to being official instead of getting excited during the early stages. The new Planning Rule provides lots of opportunity and increased numbers of public meetings across the country. There was a meeting in Cheyenne, WY on March 24, 2011.

In general there are four themes in the new Planning Rule which are different:

1. More collaboration – Resource Advisory Committees and other programs working together to assist with Forest planning.
2. Species variability – threatened and endangered species will remain, but the Planning Rule wants to encourage more plant and animal diversity across the landscape. There will be more to come on the steps and processes.
3. Increased monitoring requirements – monitoring is valuable, but the Forest Service may not have the budget or workforce to complete it. The Planning Rule may be looking at collaboration efforts with outside groups to help complete the monitoring procedures.
4. Healthy Forest Restoration Act – brought an objection process very similar to the BLM. The Planning Rule will be looking at streamlining the appeal process.

Rick Cooksey explained that in developing the planning rule, there was a real commitment to collaboration. There were 35 regional and national round tables meetings held, 16 tribal consults, multiple science forums, and something like 26,000 comments received. There are a couple of new perspectives; one unique thing is at a landscape level. The Planning Rule encourages an all lands approach by developing National Forest and Grassland plans in context with what is best for the land next to the Forest. The mandate of the Planning Rule is different.

The 90 day comment period will finish up on May 16, 2011. The forums and target for rolling out this rule is near the end of December. This Planning Rule is meant to be a general and strategic plan. Currently, we are operating under the 2000 Planning Rule. The new Planning Rule would be more general and not as specific. In the planning process, community economics is part of the consideration.

DISCUSSION:

Question from Win Dermody: With the new Planning Rule, does the Forest Supervisor have the final say, or can litigation tie his/her hands and prevent progress?

Question from Jeff Fry: Will the Planning Rule effect grazing permits?

Rick Cooksey: Yes and no. There should be similar use for grazing unless significant condition changes take place. The Planning Rule takes into account that one shoe doesn't fit all.

Phil Cruz: The new rule may shed light on a lot of things that need to be reconsidered. It has been written in hopes that Forest Supervisors will have discretion, and there are no black and white rules to be applied nationwide.

Duane Short: During meetings with the authors of the new Planning Rule in Washington D.C., it was emphasized at every step that local discretion must be maintained.

Question from Win Dermody: The bottom line is that the Forest Supervisor may have discretion but then litigation holds up progress. Is there a way that this litigation can be eliminated by the new rule?

Rick Cooksey: The process should reduce that to some extent. The Forest Service used to produce a plan with alternatives, but this Planning Rule is supposed to be a step by step process in which the public can include comments while documents are written. The appeals process will still stand, and suits can still be filed. The idea is that hopefully issues will be address before they become appeals.

Question from Barbara Vasquez: What is the future of the RAC?

Phil Cruz: There will still be a role on an interest basis to follow and monitor projects. Congress has been talking about it, and there is some speculation that money will be there for RACs but it will be coming from the Forest Service budget. Each member has a 4 year term.

Rick Cooksey: There has been a proposal to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools Act.

Motion from Win Dermody and seconded by Jeff Fry to adjourn the meeting.